



Michigan Election Coalition
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www.statevoices.org/mec · (313) 712-6062

April 22, 2009

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS AND ELECTIONS

Re: No reason absentee voting

Tierney Eaton – Coordinator, Michigan Election Coalition

Representative Angerer and other distinguished committee members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Michigan Election Coalition, in support of no reason absentee voting.

I represent the Michigan Election Coalition (MEC), a group of community and grassroots organizations which include ACCESS, APIA Vote Michigan, Common Cause of Michigan and many others. As a nonpartisan election reform coalition, we believe that an active and more engaged electorate lies at the foundation of every democracy. We are dedicated to removing the unnecessary barriers eligible voters face when they exercise their right to vote. During the 2008 Presidential election, we ran an election protection program designed to assist voters and collect information about Michigan's elections. Last month, we released the findings of our 2008 election protection effort in our first Post-Election Report. The report highlighted the fact that despite being ranked seventh in the nation in a state-by-state comparison of voter turnout, Michigan's rising electorate still faces unnecessary barriers when exercising the right to vote.

A common barrier to voting Michiganders still face is the amount of time they have to wait to vote on Election Day. In the City of Ypsilanti (Precinct 17-Southside Baptist Tabernacle Church), several voters complained of waiting three hours to vote in November's federal election. Other voters reported similar wait times in the City of Detroit (Precincts 27, 30- St. Timothy Methodist Church). These very long wait times are unacceptable, as voters with work obligations or child care responsibilities are unable to wait in such long lines, and thus, are



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unable to vote. Our volunteers reported that several voters were disenfranchised in November's election because they could no longer wait in such long lines to exercise their right to vote. We believe that no-reason absentee voting is a viable solution to this problem.

Michigan law requires that a voter swear to one of six statutory reasons for why she is applying for an absentee ballot. One reason requires that a voter be absent from her county during Election Day in order to be eligible to receive an absentee ballot. Michigan's current absentee voter requirements do not account for someone who is present in the jurisdiction on Election Day, who is physically able to make it to the polls on Election Day, but because of her work or other time constraints, cannot wait for hours to vote. We believe that voters should not have to prove weeks before the election that they will be unable to stand in long line at the polls on Election Day in order to receive an absentee ballot.

No-excuse absentee voting opens up the democratic process so that all voters, even those with busy schedules, have an opportunity to exercise their fundamental right to vote. The MEC, therefore, strongly support no reason-absentee voting and encourage your support as well.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and your commitment to ensuring that all eligible Michigan voters can cast their ballots free from unnecessary barriers.